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One Recantation Calls for Another

The fantastic Hungarian flip-flop on Laszlo Rajk not only forces a public recantation of charges against Tito's Yugoslavia, but puts Hungary's Communist regime in the uncomfortable spot of having to admit the U. S. hasn't been plotting against it after all.

Yugoslavia and the U. S. were twin targets of Rajk's 1949 "confession." Rajk, Hungary's former No. 2 Red, told of plotting with Alexander Rankovic, Yugoslav police boss, to assassinate Matyas Rakosi and other Hungarian Communist leaders in order to turn Hungary into a "colony of Yugoslavia." Rajk then dragged in American accomplices—Lt. Col. George Kovach, a member of the U. S. military mission to Budapest, a Martin Himmler, and Selden Chapin, U. S. minister to Hungary.

Kovach and Himmler were described as U. S. agents working to demoralize and overthrow the regime. Chapin allegedly promised support for a Yugoslav plan to invade Hungary. Another American, Allen Dulles, now head of the Central Intelligence Agency, was implicated in the plotting by another defendant.

The Rajk affair stands as a ghastly indictment of the Communist system, of its standards of justice, of its snap-of-the-finger disdain for human life. The stage managers of Rajk's "trial" called up 19 prosecution witnesses against him. They had him declare his misdeeds in an abject five-hour confession. For a clincher, when the death penalty was ordered, Rajk stated: "I acquiesce. I consider the sentence justified. I do not agree with my lawyer in principle when he asks for an appeal."

Now this business is called a fake by Matyas Rakosi, the Hungarian Communist leader who ran the government during the Rajk trial. All the trumped up charges and terrorization of witnesses are explained away by finding other scapegoats in Beria of the Soviet Union and his alleged Hungarian accomplices.

U. S. information agencies should lose no time exploiting the lessons of the Rajk case: the utter lack of safeguards and respect for human dignity under Communism. The U. S. might well "rub it in" by demanding an official apology for the unfounded charges leveled in the Rajk trial.

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